" The Humiston Family/Trust"

a talk by Louis Lyons at Historical Society Feb. 23, 2012

There is also the Fred and Alta Byrne (sp)Trust. They had land in Forest and Saunemin areas. The trust is worth one million dollars now. The trust is managed by the same board as the Humiston Trust. The Byrne Trust is very like the Humiston Trust. It is used to fund small items in Pontiac.

Apollos Camp was Born in 1806 at Plymouth, Connecticut. In 1852 at age 46 he moved to Pontiac. He was a stone mason, a foreman of farms, and a superintendent of a Seth Thomas clocks facility. He married Nancy, a niece or a daughter of Seth Thomas. They had a son named Edward and a daughter named Harriette. Nancy died in 1863, Edward died in 1864 at age 21, Apollos died in 1882 at age 86.

Apollos and Bennett Humiston became business partners. They bought land which included what we now know as Humiston Woods.

Bennett was raised on a large farm. He married Harriette and they lived on a farm in Esman township. In 1875 they built a house for $6,000 at 908 North Main Street in Pontiac. They did not have children. Bennett died at age 53 in 1883.

Harriette was very frugal. At one time she lived mainly in the basement. A story was told that if four sat down to dinner, there were only four cookies on the dessert plate.

Harriette loaned money to many people over her lifetime. She did not always get the money back. She worked on her loans through her basement and with cash.

Harriette signed her will September 4, 1920. She died October 18, 1920.

In a 1920 news article in the Pontiac newspaper it was mentioned that Harriette had established a YMCA (where the Daily Leader currently is). This YMCA building had an indoor pool. She also helped fund the original part of the old St. James Hospital which was located on Water Street. She also established grants for college students.

According to her will Harriette left $3,000 to the Pontiac Episcopal Church which her father had been involved in. She left $5,000 each to the Presbyterian Church in Pontiac, and to the Congregational Church in Odell.

Harriette left money for an "old ladies home" to be built which became known as Humiston Haven. It is now named Asta Care.

She also left money to four ladies who had been named Harriette after her. Harriette Lester Johnson was a 3 ½ pound twin. Her family lived across the street from Harriet who bought a cow so baby Harriette would have fresh milk. When Harriette Lester was a young girl she showed promise as a piano player, so Harriette Humiston bought a piano for her. Harriette Lester Johnson was left $400. The other three Harriettes were left $500 each.

Harriette indicated in her will that since she had no relatives living near by to have close relationships with her she was not leaving money to the relatives. She chose to leave money to friends, and to her community. She had promised her father to leave some money to the community. Harriette created the Apollos Camp-Bennett Humiston Trust for that purpose.

Relatives wanted money, so they contested the will. There were four witnesses to the signing of the will: two doctors, one lawyer, and one neighbor. At the hearing it was learned that the neighbor was invited by the lawyer to go to Harriette's house. He did not know the purpose of the visit until he arrived. He observed that Harriette was not in good health and that she seemed feeble. The others had trouble getting her set up to sign the will. Her signature is not very legible. There were one hundred to one hundred and sixty witness in the hearing. There are six hundred to seven hundred pages of testimony. The family wanted $250,000 but the Trust would only offer $80,000. Relatives finally agreed to the $80,000 in February 1922. They were to get $20,000 on July 1. Another $30,000 was to be paid out July 15, with the remaining $30,000 to be paid August 31. The lawyers asked for $50,000 but the Court allowed $30,000.

In 1925 the public wanted to see something happen with the money from the Trust. There was a petition for $30,000-$35,000 to build Camp Humiston Pool at Chatauqua Park. The above ground pool actually cost closer to $50,000 to build. It was one of nine pools like it at that time. It looked like a top hat set down on its top. The top was the pool deck and the locker rooms were down below around the actual pool structure.

Harriette had provided for George Knepp, a trusted employee who had lived in the house while she lived, to have $20,000 and to be allowed to live in the house at 908 North Main Street until his death. He decided to move in with his niece. There is a bedroom in the house that is referred to as "George's room".

Harriette's home was empty from her death until 1926 when the Husteds bought it. Then the Detterdings lived in the house. Barb Husted Jobst and her husband John bought the house. Barb was the Husted's daughter and had grown up in the house. Al Lindsey bought the house.

In 1927 the Court ordered that the five men who had worked for seven years to manage the Trust and the lands would get $30,000 to share as their payment.

At one time there was land in Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Florida, as well as 640 acres in Canada. In 1935 the Trust sold off the 13,000 acres of Florida land getting $2,500. The Trust sold a farm north of Pontiac in 1935. They lost acres of another farm in 1936 due to foreclosure. This farm was past the Old Log Cabin site in Pontiac. Pontiac High School students had been allowed to walk out to this farm to learn farming. In 1979 there were 600 acres of land sold in Iowa. A farm north of Humiston Woods was sold in the mid 1980s. In 1992 there were 320 acres of land in Indiana sold for half a million dollars.

In 1994 the Trust decided to sell Humiston Haven Nursing Home because it was too costly to maintain. The sale brought one million six hundred thousand dollars.

The Trust must spend out 5% of the appraised value of the land it manages on a yearly basis on projects in the "Pontiac area". The "Pontiac area" now is a very different size than it was in the 1920s horse and buggy days. The land must be appraised every five years. At this time $500,000 is granted out yearly.

Some programs/projects that the Trust has funded:

Future's Unlimited

Public Health Department

Humiston Riverside Park

Boys and Girls Club

The War Museum

the swimming pool

the Recreation Center

4-H County Fair

Humiston Woods Nature Center

Livingston County Historical Society

Vermillion Players

Pontiac Library

Pontiac Schools: PTHS all weather track, musical instruments, playgrounds

Needy Kids Fund

Jr. Baseball

Alcoholics Anonymous

Some programs/projects that the Byrne Trust has funded:

Strevele House

Lincoln School playground

7th Grade trip to the Challenger Center

Pontiac Library

Livingston County Advocacy Center